

PART 3

COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE &  
RECREATION MISSION

*The Neighborhoods*

Allston-Brighton

Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Central Boston

Charlestown

Dorchester

East Boston

Fenway/Kenmore

Hyde Park

Jamaica Plain

**Mattapan**

Roslindale

Roxbury

South Boston

South End

West Roxbury



## PART 3 • COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE &amp; RECREATION MISSION

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS:

*Mattapan*

## THE SETTING

## History

**M**attapan became part of Boston in 1870 as part of the annexation of the town of Dorchester. Mattapan is predominantly residential, a classic “streetcar suburb.” First the Midlands Branch railroad in 1855 and then the trolley in the 1890s opened up Mattapan to waves of residential construction. The Franklin sub-neighborhood, in the northern third of Mattapan, was more densely built-up with two- and three-family houses. The middle third, the Wellington Hill area, had single-family home construction mixed in with the two- and three-family homes. In the southern third of Mattapan, east and west of Mattapan Square, single-family homes on larger lots were built in the middle of the 20th century. Mattapan Square, at the confluence of Blue Hill Avenue, River Street, and Cummins Highway, with MBTA Red Line trolley service, became the commercial heart of Mattapan.

*Mattapan is predominantly residential, a classic “streetcar suburb.”*

During the 1960s, a process of racial change occurred in Mattapan. Wellington Hill and southern Mattapan offered middle-income black families opportunities for home ownership. Unlike other parts of Blue Hill Avenue, Mattapan Square continued to be a busy neighborhood commercial district.

Because of the density and age of housing in the older Franklin area, poorer black families were able to afford housing there. A period of disinvestment, deterioration, and abandonment affected this neighborhood severely. By the 1980s, with market improvement and public housing investments, the Franklin area stabilized.

However, Blue Hill Avenue in this area still exhibits some of the effects of this period of decline, with several vacant storefronts.

Mattapan has seen overall improvements in the 1990s thanks to continued public and private investment, spurred on in part by the general growth in the national economy and by the significant reduction in street gang- and drug-related crime.

#### Mattapan Demographic and Housing Profile

##### POPULATION

2000 Census	37,486
1990 Census	36,135
1980 Census	35,827
Population Growth/Decline, 1990-2000	3.74%
Population Growth/Decline, 1980-1990	0.86%

#### DEMOGRAPHICS/HOUSING

The decade between 1970 and 1980 saw a population decline of almost 10,000 persons, over 20% of the 1970 population. The population figure for 1990, 36,135, represents a 1% increase over the 1980 figure of 35,827. Population growth of 3.74% in the 1990s yielded a 2000 population total for Mattapan of 37,486.

Mattapan has a lower percentage of traditional married couple families than the total city-wide population (46% versus 59% for Boston) and a higher percentage of single-parent households (54% versus 41% for Boston). Mattapan remains a predominantly non-white neighborhood, but with the Hispanic share

#### AGE

2000 Census		
0-17 years	12,239	33%
18 and over	25,247	67%
1990 Census		
0-4 years	3,312	9%
5-9 years	3,055	9%
10-14 years	2,810	8%
15-17 years	1,816	5%
18-20 years	1,798	5%
21-24 years	2,419	7%
25-29 years	3,297	9%
30-34 years	3,179	9%
35-44 years	5,471	15%
45-54 years	3,916	11%
55-59 years	1,237	3%
60-64 years	1,106	3%
65-74 years	1,425	4%
75-84 years	617	2%
85 years and over	226	1%
Average Age (1990 Census)	30.9	

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC/HOUSING/DENSITY

Population 16 Years and Older, by Employment Status	
(1990 Census)	%
Employed in armed forces	less than 1
Employed civilians	60
Unemployed civilians	9
Not in labor force	31
Median Household Income (1990 Census)	\$28,591
Occupied Units Ownership	
(1990 Census)	% Units
Owner occupied	36
Renter occupied	64
Number of Year Round Units in Structure	
(1990 Census)	% Units
Single units	22
Double units	23
3-9 units	37
10-19 units	9
20-49 units	6
50 or more units	2
All other	1
Single/Multiple Unit Ratio	0.28

#### Households by Age and Poverty Status

1990 Census)	% Households
Above poverty, under age 65	67
Above poverty, age 65 and over	9
Below poverty, under age 65	21
Below poverty, age 65 and over	2

#### Household by Number of Vehicles

(1990 Census)	% Households
No vehicles	33
1 vehicles	43
2 or more vehicles	24

#### Population Density

	Persons per Square Mile
1980 Census	14,141.4
1990 Census	14,906.7
Density Change 1980 to 1990	765.3

RACE	1980 Census	1990 Census	2000 Census
White	5,460 15%	2,792 8%	1,428 4%
Black	28,132 79%	30,244 84%	29,018 77%
Hispanic	1,645 5%	2,585 7%	4,716 13%
Asian or Pacific Islander	89 less than 1%	242 1%	347 1%
Other	501 1%	272 1%	1,977 5%

increasing from 7% in 1990 to 13% in 2000. It has a significantly younger population than the city as a whole: the 1990 average age in Mattapan was 30.9 versus 34.6 for Boston; and the percent of persons 17 years and younger was 31% for Mattapan versus 19% for Boston. In 2000, that share of persons 17 years and younger grew to 33%, versus 20% for the city as a whole.

Mattapan's income profile was lower than Boston's in terms of household median income (\$28,591 versus \$29,180, respectively) and in percent of households in poverty status (23% versus 17%, respectively). Unemployment was also higher than for Boston (9% versus 6%, respectively).

Single- and two-family homes make up 45% of Mattapan's housing stock, with another 37% of the housing type being 3-9 unit residential structures. While 38% of Mattapan's residential structures was in the 3-9 unit range, only 30% of the city's housing stock was in the single- and two-family home range. Given the lower scale of the vast majority of units, backyards

#### HOUSEHOLDS

Households			Persons in Households		
1990 Census	11,255		(1990 Census)	Households	%
1980 Census	11,084		1 person households	2,087	19
Household Growth/Decline, 1980-1990	2.28%		2 person households	2,705	24
Population by household type			3 person households	2,315	21
(1990 Census)	% Persons		4 person households	1,934	17
Family households	90%		5 or more person hshlds	2,214	20
Non-family households	9%		Average Persons per Household (1990 Census)	3.13	
Group quarters	1%		Family Type		
Households w/ One or More Persons Under 18 Years			(1990 Census)	% Families	
(1990 Census)	Households	%	Married couple	46	
All households	11,240	100%	Other family, male head	9	
No one under 18	5,656	50%	Other family, female head	45	
One or more under 18	5,583	50%	Families as a % of All Households	77%	
Households with Children by Type					
(1990 Census)		%			
Married couple families	41				
Other family, male head	7				
Other family, female head	51				
Non-family	1				

are a likely component of the house lot. However, many houselots in the Franklin area are small for two- and three-family homes. As a suburban neighborhood, fewer households have no vehicles available than for Boston as a whole (33% versus 38%, respectively.)

## THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM TODAY

### Equity and Investment

**M**attapan has a total of 452 acres in its open space inventory of parks, playgrounds, squares, and malls. However, only 174 acres are considered protected. With a 2000 population of 37,486, the ratio of protected open space acres per thousand persons translates to 4.65 acres per thousand persons, below the city average of 7.43 acres per thousand persons.

The City of Boston invested close to \$1.7 million in improving three of its four recreational facilities in Mattapan: Harambee (Franklin Field), Hunt (Almont) and Walker (see table). Ball fields, play lots, and courts, as well as associated infrastructure, have been rehabilitated thanks to the *Getting the Job Done* capital program of the City of Boston.

#### CAPITAL PROJECTS 1993-2000/ MATTAPAN

Harambee Park (Franklin Field)	\$ 1,000,000
Hunt Playground	\$ 203,606
Walker Playground	\$ 443,000
Total	\$ 1,646,606

### Assessment

#### Enhancing Existing Facilities

**T**he approaches for assessment fall into two categories: enhancing existing facilities and developing new opportunities. The city has made significant investments in Mattapan's city parks. Further proposed investments will be evaluated for scheduling in the ongoing maintenance of effort cycle – capital planning, design and maintenance – for the Parks Department facilities. Candidates for capital rehabilitation include Harambee (tennis courts), Thetford-Evans, and Walker.

Other existing facilities that deserve attention include schoolyards, thoroughfares, and waterfront access. With localized areas underserved by existing park space, the barren, paved schoolyards have the potential to meet their needs. The Mayor's Schoolyard Initiative has re-designed many such schoolyards to be educational and community open space assets and can provide the leadership for change on this issue in Mattapan. The Mattahunt and Taylor Schools have Schoolyard Initiative projects underway that will help address sub-neighborhoods that lack play lots.



Thetford-Evans Park

### *Townscape/Scenic Enhancements*

**T**horoughfares have also tended to look barren but have the potential to provide a healthier image for Mattapan by careful use of landscape elements. Major reconstruction has been done on Blue Hill Avenue from Franklin Park to Mattapan Square. The work has included street tree and median strip plantings. Judicious landscape treatment, including the use of planters enlivened with annuals supplied and designed by the Parks Department's Horticulture Unit, in such a prominent location has provided an example for other thoroughfares in the neighborhood, such as American Legion Highway and the MDC's Morton Street.

### *Connecting (to) the Neponset River*

**W**aterfront access is an unrealized opportunity in Mattapan. Only the MDC's Ryan Playground and Kennedy Playground and Community Gardens offer access to the water – the Neponset. The rehabilitation of Ryan Playground a few years ago, along with additional attention from the Greenways to the Harbor program, has provided paths down to and along the river including canoe launches at Ryan and Kennedy. (The Greenways to the Harbor program is a joint effort of the Boston Natural Areas Network and the MDC. The community partner is the Neponset River Greenway Coordinating Council, composed of residents of Dorchester, Mattapan, Milton, and Hyde Park.)

The MDC Planning Office is systematically looking at means to improve access to the Neponset from the mouth of the river westward to Mattapan Square and has made a recent acquisition just west of Mattapan Square adjacent to Kennedy Playground and Community Garden. The mid-1990s saw the MDC release The Lower Neponset River Reservation Master Plan. This plan calls for a greenway to be developed from the mouth of the

Neponset at Dorchester and Quincy, and along the river inland to the Mattapan Square. It calls for a new park – Edgewater Park – near Mattapan Square, adjacent to Kennedy Playground and Community Gardens, to ensure greater riverfront public access. Last summer’s opening of the MDC Pope John Paul II Park and this summer’s opening of the Neponset River Greenway to Central Avenue, both in Dorchester, are important steps toward the fulfillment of the MDC Master Plan for the Lower Neponset. The Parks Department, through its Open Space Acquisition Program, may also be able to help the MDC improve access to the water from the adjacent neighborhood through acquisitions of parcels that, while not fronting on the river, do help residents access the MDC parcels that are on the river.

The MDC has suggested, in an appendix to the Lower Neponset master plan, at continuing its planning for a Neponset River Greenway system that continues west of Mattapan Square into Hyde Park. That will make the entire Neponset River Greenway from the Harbor westward a more valuable and usable recreation opportunity for the city as a whole, and for residents of Hyde Park, Dorchester, and Mattapan. One important planning vision based on this westward extension of the Greenway would be to connect the Neponset River to the Charles River via Mother Brook in Hyde Park. This would result in a continuous riverside greenway from the mouth of the Neponset to the mouth of the Charles. The Harborwalk system would then connect the mouth of the Neponset to the mouth of the Charles to form a continuous open space system encircling Boston ... a “Blue-and-Green Ring.” The city will assist with planning and through other means, but the major role in implementing this vision will be in the hands of the state, especially the MDC. As the Lower Neponset River Reservation Master Plan gets fully implemented, this vision will gain more attention from the public.

### *Addressing New Needs, Developing New Opportunities*

One of the strongest needs in Mattapan is for the provision of more soccer and cricket fields. Given the large immigrant population in Mattapan (as well as soccer’s growing nationwide popularity), this appears to be a valid need. Especially given the high proportion of children in the neighborhood population, other needs identified include neighborhood-oriented play lots in underserved areas and ball fields. Mattapan has several open land resources available with the potential to meet this need. Vacant lots exist throughout many areas of Mattapan. To assure that some portion of city-owned vacant tracts provide usable open space, the Department of Neighborhood Development is working with the Parks Department to evaluate vacant lots for potential park uses through Parks Department participation in the Real Estate Management Committee at DND.

Another city-owned resource is the surplus land at the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital on River Street. A portion of this site is known as Gladeside I, a ten-acre BRA-designated urban wild targeted for preservation in the city's master plan for the Hospital (a highly significant urban wild for this neighborhood as identified by the 1990 BNAF urban wilds report). The plan also targets the remaining northernmost surplus land for some type of urbanized development – family housing or elderly housing. Open space in some portion of this housing project was proposed in the city master plan – primarily active in the case of family housing or passive in the case of elderly housing. (Both Gladeside I and the surplus north area of the hospital campus have the potential to provide an open space corridor from the interior of Mattapan to the Neponset River and Ryan Playground, a further motive for action on these opportunities.)



Almont Playground

Gladeside I would be a suitable site for natural area management by the Boston Parks Department. With programming through the Park Rangers and the School Department, Gladeside I would be an important environmental education resource for the youth of this area.

In addition to Gladeside I, the protection of the ecologically significant urban wild known as the Pendergast Preventorium will help enable the residents of Mattapan to find a balance in open space types not often found in many places in the city. It is comprised of a large forested wetland and smaller areas of upland forest. It can be an environmental education resource for city schoolchildren (the Mattahunt School (BPS) is close by), and a part of the outreach of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Boston Nature Center. At the time of this writing, the Parks Department is seeking to purchase this parcel (aka Mattahunt Woods) for the protection and enhancement of its natural resources.

Mattapan's largest land resource with open space potential is the Boston State Hospital, which closed in 1981. Parts are BRA-designated urban wilds; part is already used as community gardens. Given that some of Mattapan's underserved areas border this site, active recreation should be considered as a possible use for a portion of this site. Numerous development proposals have been made for the 175-acre site. In 1996, the Massachusetts Audubon Society acquired 68 acres of the Hospital and has subsequently created the Boston Nature Center, funded by the City of Boston George Robert White Fund. Other proposals call for another 62 acres to be earmarked for commercial and housing uses.



Thetford-Evans Park

## THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

**M**uch has been accomplished in the last eight years for the city's recreational facilities in Mattapan. Further improvements of the city facilities are desired, as well as basic rehabilitation of the MDC facilities. Underserved areas should be addressed. Vacant lots may supply part of the answer to providing recreational facilities for those underserved areas. Access to a future greenway on the Neponset River, and the protection and management of natural areas, emerged as two other major themes.

### Opportunities

#### *Enhancing Existing Facilities*

- Continue to participate in the community efforts with the MDC to secure the state's reinvestment in Kennedy Playground, a neighborhood facility in need of rehabilitation.
- Continue the cyclic restoration of capital facilities in the city-owned park system, such as Thetford-Evans, Harambee, and Walker.
- Give priority to public schools in Mattapan for allocations from the Boston Schoolyard Initiative, in light of the needs both of the school's population and resident children in Mattapan.

#### *Townscape/Scenic Enhancements*

- Green-up and make more bicycle-friendly (such as use of bike lanes) major thoroughfares such as American Legion Highway, Cummins Highway, River Street, and the MDC Morton Street.

#### *Connecting (to) the Neponset River*

- Explore with the MDC enhancing formalized access along the Neponset River Reservation. Work with the MDC Planning Office on implementing the master plan for the Neponset from the Harbor to Mattapan Square. Work with the Neponset River Greenway Coordinating Council to urge the MDC to plan for a Neponset Greenway from Mattapan Square to Hyde Park.
- Advance the MDC's progress toward implementation of Edgewater Park, assuring connections to Mattapan Square and the Neponset River.
- Support the Army Corps of Engineers study of the impacts of dam removal on the Neponset, which should encourage use of the river by non-motorized water craft such as canoes and kayaks.

### *Addressing New Needs, Developing New Opportunities*

- Continue the participation by Parks Department staff in DND's Real Estate Management Committee. Monitor disposition of vacant parcels by the city, which could be turned into play lots or playing fields.
- Develop public multi-purpose (active and passive) open space from a portion of the excess land designated for housing development at the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital. Work with DND and BRA to assure development of this open space opportunity for new and old residents of this underserved area.
- Preserve the ten-acre Gladeside I urban wild through transfer of the site to Parks Department jurisdiction. Develop measures for access, resource protection, and environmental education to create a highly valued neighborhood asset.
- Support the acquisition of the Pendergast Preventorium site (aka Mattahunt Woods), a six-acre undeveloped parcel on Harvard Street, as a new city-owned urban wild and environmental education asset.
- Promote the city's interest in preserving portions of the Boston State Hospital (BSH) site for open space. Devote a portion of this large site to active recreation uses for neighborhoods surrounding BSH, which are far from Harambee, Hunt, and Walker Playground.
- Encourage the continuing development of the Boston Nature Center by the Massachusetts Audubon Society (MAS). Work with MAS and the MBTA to improve public transportation to the site. Assist MAS in marketing the site, especially in view of possible links to the Arboretum and Franklin Park, and regional greenways.

### **Community Priorities**

#### *Enhancing Existing Facilities*

- Continue maintenance, install water fountains, and assist community gardens at Hunt Playground. Improve basketball lighting at Hunt.
- Support the Blue Hill Avenue Boys and Girls Club leased management of the George Robert White Youth Development Center located at Harambee (a recently constructed \$4 million youth recreation center funded through the City of Boston Trust Office). Coordinate with such groups as the Lena Park Association and the Dorchester YMCA.
- Provide a full-time parkkeeper for Walker Playground to overcome the overwhelming sense of "turf" that limits its usability.
- Encourage appropriate passive recreational use of cemeteries.

*Townscape/Scenic Enhancements*

- Continue maintaining thoroughfares such as Blue Hill Avenue and American Legion Highway.
- Encourage further outreach by the Parks Department to inform the community about obtaining more public shade trees on residential streets. Market the 635-PARK constituent service line as the means to obtain public shade trees.

*Connecting (to) the Neponset River*

- Increase access to the Neponset River waterfront. Undertake appropriate integrated pest management practices to control mosquitoes.

*Addressing New Needs, Developing New Opportunities*

- Provide for more and better-distributed fields for soccer, baseball, and Little League.
- Pursue siting of more close-to-home play lots in several underserved sub-areas of Mattapan. Investigate one potential site in an underserved sub-area, the “North Expansion Area,” a portion of the vacant land at the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital campus.
- Provide for small, scattered basketball court sites and play lots for older children (aged 7-12) in the Franklin Field South Area. Work with the DND neighborhood initiative to investigate using vacant lands for this purpose.
- Convert some vacant lots into open space. Look at alternative funding sources such as the DND Grassroots program.
- Encourage residential abutters to acquire adjacent unbuildable city-owned vacant lots through the DND Abutter Lots program.
- Encourage private owners to clean up their vacant lots. This will prevent rats, dumping, and use by drug traffickers and users.
- Make more citizens aware of city assistance (Boston Youth Fund crews, etc.) for vacant lot maintenance.

## FACILITIES

## MATTAPAN

## Parks, Playgrounds &amp; Athletic Fields

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Almont Park/Hunt Playground	17.81	•	Parks	1	1			1	2	4		1			1	1					1							
Boston State Hospital	131.60		COM/DCAM																									
Franklin Hill BHA Court	0.31		COB/BHA						1																			
Harambee Park	45.60	•	Parks		1	1	1	3	4	6		1			2						1							
Thetford/Evans Playground	0.69	•	Parks						1			1	1															
Walker Playground	5.95	•	Parks		2			1	2	1		1	1								1							Open Shelter

## Parkways, Reservations &amp; Beaches

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Franklin Park Zoo Parking	12.20	•	MDC																			1						
Kennedy Garden	0.16	•	MDC																							1		Native Plant Nursery/ Greenhouse
Kennedy Playground	0.40	•	MDC																									Canoe Access (Neponset River)
Msgr. Francis A. Ryan Park	6.70	•	MDC			1		1	2	2		1										1						Access to Neponset River Trail; Running Track, Swimming Pool
Neponset River Reservation II	21.55	•	MDC																									
American Legion Highway	4.59		COB																									
Morton Street	0.25	•	MDC																									

## Urban Wilds &amp; Natural Areas

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Blue Hill Rock	0.75		BHA																									
Boston Nature Center	34.62	•	MAS																			1					1	Visitor's Center
Canterbury II	21.02	•	MDC																									
Gladeside I	9.50		COB/PHC																								1	
Gladeside II	1.09		Private																									
Harvard-Livermore Tract	5.64		Private																									
Pendergast Preventorium	6.53		Private																									
Willowood Rock	0.16		COB/DND																									
Woodhaven	2.10		COB/DND																									

## Cemeteries &amp; Burying Grounds

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
St. Mary's Cemetery	10.61		Private																									
St. Michael's Cemetery	12.30		Private																									
New Calvary Cemetery	90.00		Private																									

## Malls, Squares &amp; Plazas

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Blue Hill Avenue	1.35		COB																									

## Community Gardens

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Boston Nature Center Garden	6.75	•	MAS																								1	
Franklin Field BHA Garden	0.40		COB/BHA																								1	
Franklin Hill BHA Garden	0.50		COB/BHA																								1	
Lucerne/Balsam Street Garden	0.20	•	BNAN																								1	
Revision House Garden	0.20		COB/DND																								1	
Shangri-La Gardens	0.30	•	Parks																								1	
We Can/Rev. Mitchner Garden	0.20		Private																								1	

## Legend

P	Protected	TN	Tennis Court	FN	Fountain	VB	Volleyball Area
BB	Baseball Field	SH	Street Hockey	HB	Handball	AR	Artwork/Monuments
SB	Softball Field	PL	Children's Play Lot	HS	Horseshoes	CG	Community Garden
LL	Little League Field	WS	Water Spray Feature	LC	Lacrosse	NT	Nature Trail
FB	Football Field	CS	Concessions	PA	Passive Area		
SC	Soccer Field	CR	Cricket Field	PK	Parking Area		
BK	Basketball Court	FH	Field House	RG	Rugby Field		

